

# COVER TENNESSEE

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An Update from the office of Governor Phil Bredesen

August 3, 2006

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## PEDIATRICIAN AND CHILD POLICY ADVOCATE NAMED TO LEAD COVERKIDS

Earlier this month, Governor Phil Bredesen named pediatrician and veteran public health expert Dr. Andrea Willis, MD, MPH to lead CoverKids, Tennessee's new program to provide comprehensive health insurance to Tennessee children. CoverKids is part of Governor Phil Bredesen's Cover Tennessee program for affordable insurance. CoverKids creates a partnership between the state and the federal government to extend comprehensive healthcare insurance to every uninsured child in Tennessee.

Dr. Willis, most recently the Deputy Commissioner at the Tennessee Department of Health, now begins service under the Department of Finance & Administration. "Dr. Willis has been a true advocate for children's health," said F & A Commissioner Dave Goetz. "Her experience as a pediatrician and policymaker will be invaluable as we strive to make insurance coverage available to every uninsured child in Tennessee through CoverKids."

CoverKids brings the State Comprehensive Health Insurance Plan(SCHIP) program to Tennessee with a three to one federal match for every state dollar invested. It will offer a comprehensive health insurance plan to children up to age 19 in

families that earn less than 250 percent of the federal poverty level, or about \$50,000 for a family of four.

Next steps for CoverKids include the finalization and submission of a Tennessee Children's Plan to the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS). Enrollment is set to begin in November, 2006 with coverage beginning in January, 2007.

To sign up for ongoing updates on Cover Tennessee, call 1-888-486-9355 or go to [www.tennessee.gov](http://www.tennessee.gov).

Originally from Athens, Alabama, Dr. Willis has been Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Health since 2003. Among her achievements in the Department of Health, she initiated a departmental partnership with the Boys and Girls Clubs of Tennessee to implement a nutrition and physical activity curriculum called "Commit To Be Fit".

With a medical degree from Georgetown University and a Masters of Public Health from Johns Hopkins University, she is also a fellow of the American Academy of Pediatrics and a member of the RH Boyd Society of the United Way.

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## Children's Hospital Alliance of Tennessee Hosts CoverKids Conversations

The childrens' hospitals and pediatricians across the state have had a rare opportunity to impact health policy in the making. Hitting the ground running in her new assignment, CoverKids Director Dr. Andrea Willis has been traveling the state to talk about what the plan is likely to include and to get hospital and physician feedback early in the planning process. These meetings have been facilitated by the Children's Hospital Alliance of Tennessee.

"The childrens' hospitals and pediatricians were among our earliest allies in bringing this program to Tennessee," said Dr. Willis. "They understand implicitly what it means for a child to miss out on well baby and well child exams or to go without a relationship with a medical provider early in life. Children who do not have insurance often go without medical care until their condition becomes an emergency, and this has health implications for the rest of their lifetime."

Meetings with child advocates are also scheduled in coming weeks.

CoverKids offers eligible children comprehensive health insurance modeled on the state employee health plan. The state is currently developing the

plan which will then be submitted to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) for approval.

The plan will be submitted to CMS by September 1, 2006, with enrollment to begin in November and benefits to begin in January, 2007.

"Our timeline is tight, but we are determined," continued Willis. "There are approximately 150,000 uninsured children in Tennessee and we intend to get this program up and running so that their families will have a way to get them health insurance."

To expedite the process, the state has contracted with SCHIP experts to assist in the preparation of Tennessee's SCHIP application to CMS.

**To sign up for updates on  
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